

State Forest Assessment and Strategy Overview

January 15, 2010

The Delaware Forest Service (DFS) is working on Delaware's statewide forest assessment and strategy as required by the 2008 Farm Bill. The **statewide assessment** will identify the state's most important rural and urban forested areas (critical forested landscapes) along with the challenges and opportunities facing our forests; the **statewide strategy** will describe the actions that the DFS will take over the next five years, working with partners, to address these challenges and opportunities and the performance measures we will use to gauge our success. Congress is requiring this process to help ensure that states are spending the federal funds they receive for state and privately owned forests as efficiently and effectively as possible. (The DFS receives approximately \$600,000 annually through the federal State and Private Forestry budget, which is approximately 1/3 of the DFS's annual operating budget.) The DFS must submit the entire document (assessment and strategy) to the U.S. Forest Service by **June 18, 2010**.

As of now (January 2010), the DFS has completed a draft of the statewide assessment. This document was developed using input from our five-year (2009-2013) strategic plan and the Delaware Forest Stewardship Committee. This committee consists of forest landowners and representatives from the forest industry, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) – such as The Nature Conservancy and the Delaware Nature Society, consultant foresters, and other government (federal and state) agencies. The Farm Bill specified the Forest Stewardship Committee as the primary advisory committee for each state forestry agency during their development of the statewide assessment and strategy. Please note that while the assessment will identify the most critical rural and urban forests, this does not imply that forests outside of these critical areas will not be eligible for technical or financial assistance; however, the critical forested areas will receive higher priority and first attention if technical and/or financial assistance becomes limited.

Now that the initial draft of the statewide assessment is completed, the DFS is seeking additional input from other interested organizations as well as the general public. We will receive comments on the draft assessment through February 15, 2010. We will then review the comments received and make any revisions to the assessment.

We are also working on the initial draft of the second half of the document – the statewide strategy. As mentioned above, the assessment provides an overview of the current status of our forests, including the major challenges and opportunities facing our forests, and identifies those that are the most critical to our state. The strategy will then describe how we will address these challenges and opportunities over the next five years and how we will measure our progress. We hope to have a draft of the strategy read for public review in late March.

There are three documents on this site for your review; they are:

- **The entire statewide assessment** (without the final summary and appendices). This is a very large document (94 pages and less than 2 MB).
- **The conclusions from the assessment.** This is a portion of the entire assessment; it contains the issues, threats, and opportunities identified in the assessment process and maps depicting the critical (most important) rural and urban forests. This document is much smaller (22 pages and less than 1 MB).
- **An overview of the State Assessment Process.** This document was developed by the U.S. Forest Service and the state forestry agencies in the Northeast as a guide to help states complete their state assessment. It can help you better understand the process and what items are required (and not required) within the assessment document.

I hope you will take some time to review our draft assessment and provide comments by February 15. We realize this is a very long document and that your time is limited. If you do not have time to review the entire document, then I encourage you to review the conclusions document because it contains the recommendations and the maps that show the critical rural and urban forests.

Please note that we have not yet identified the most important rural and urban forests; the rural forest map currently classifies the forests as low, medium, or high. Our urban forest map classifies the urban forests in five categories (very high, high, medium, low, and very low priority). Prior to submitting the document to the U.S. Forest Service, we will have to identify the critical rural and urban forested areas. There is no specified process to accomplish this prioritization, other states are using a variety of processes including by county (not appropriate for Delaware with only three counties) and by watersheds. Based on the map, it is apparent that most of our highest ranking rural forests are in southwestern New Castle County, western Kent County, and central Sussex County; therefore, it is likely that our high priority (critical) forested areas will encompass these areas. Many of our highest ranking urban forests are in the northern and coastal portions of Delaware. If you have suggestions for delineating these areas, please include that information in your comments.

Thank you for your interest in Delaware's forests.

Austin Short
State Forester

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